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## COLLEGE MEN IN BUSINESS

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BY H. J. HAPGOOD,  
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Andrew Carnegie says that his success has been due to the men whom he gathered around him. His testimony is supported by the experience of hundreds of other business men who have found that their success lies not so much in the cleverness of their plans as in the men they secure to carry out these plans. Fifty years ago methods alone might have spelled "success" but to-day men, together with the methods, are the essentials.

The great importance of the human element in business is shown by the increased attention which it is receiving. Even ten years ago the great majority of employers conducted this feature of their business by rule of thumb, giving it secondary attention and that only during their odd moments. Nowadays, however, the heads of a great many large business concerns aver that they give more time to the selection of employees than to any other branch of their work. They believe this plan pays. The result in every case is a force of men who are first class in every respect. The employers know them all from the general manager to the lowest clerk, understand their capabilities and are always certain just what can be expected from them in the way of work. A force of men, which has been intelligently and carefully selected and in which the capabilities of each member are known to the employer, is one of the best assets any business can have. It constitutes a supply of human capital which is constantly increasing in value and which is absolutely essential to success.

Years ago in the days of small things a man's employees were not so essential for his success, for he had time to give personal attention to the various departments of his business. Nowadays, however, a large employer must have men who can give results without being watched—men with the inclination and ability to think as intelligently and work as hard as if the business were

their own. To secure a sufficient supply of such men, there have grown up organizations of employment experts and special employment departments in the charge of high salaried men who devote their entire time and energy to searching for capable men and putting them, when found, where they can work to the best advantage.

As head of one of these organizations, which is retained by over 20,000 leading employers to supply all the men they need for the more responsible business and technical positions, I have had exceptional opportunities for ascertaining the kind of men employers want. A special department of our business is devoted to supplying employers with young men of little or no experience and the records of this branch furnish valuable data on the subject of what training best fits a young man for success in the commercial world.

"What kind of qualities are demanded in men capable of being trained to fill responsible positions?" A leading newspaper asked this question some time ago of 500 successful business and professional men, most of whom were themselves employers. There was a singular unanimity in the replies received. Ninety per cent named capacity for hard work (some of them called it persistence or energy, but they all meant the same thing) as the first essential quality and nearly as many considered honesty next in importance. It is safe to say that this is the general opinion of the business world and that if 20,000 employers had been asked the question instead of 500, a large majority of them would have given the same reply.

As one employer forcefully puts the matter "What the business world needs to-day is not more ability. We have enough of that; in fact I sometimes think we have too much. What we need is more men who can and will use the ability they have faithfully and honestly. What we want and are willing to pay well for is men who combine with their ability, education and natural talents the capacity for hard work."

I regret to say, however, that men with this capacity for hard work and this strict integrity appear to be born not made. But there are many men in whom these qualities are not highly developed who will prove extremely valuable if they receive the proper training soon enough. Therefore, I believe the best way

to build an honest and hard working force is to take on men when they are young, give careful attention to their training and bring them up in the way they should go. This is the only sure way to build up just the sort of a force you want.

By young men, I do not mean those who leave school before they have reached the grammar grade but rather those from 18 to 23 years old who have received a good thorough education either along general lines or in some special branch and who are mature enough to increase quickly in value in spite of their lack of experience.

In advocating young men I do not mean to underestimate the value of age and experience. There are few concerns which could do business successfully with a force composed entirely of young men of necessarily limited experience. But too many old men are an invariable sign that the firm is drying up. It is no reflection on the ability of men who have given years to a business, but have already passed the prime of life, to advise that every employer keep constantly on hand a force of bright, capable young men whom he may train to take the places of the older men when the latter die, resign, or cross the narrow line which separates valuable experience from old-fogysm.

Every business changes rapidly nowadays, and the man who was thoroughly competent five years ago may now be out of date. To retain such a man in a responsible position is to add to the business a dead weight which is bound to seriously handicap it. Many employers are forced to this course because they have not had the foresight to keep constantly in training a force of young men.

With a reserve supply of young men to draw upon the head of a business will be saved the trouble and expense of filling responsible positions with new men who have received their training under another employer, and who will need many months to get into step with the organization. The sudden death or retirement of an old experienced man too often means the temporary disruption of some important department, because there is nobody to fill his place. All these difficulties can be avoided by engaging every year a few young men, with a view to training them carefully and molding them into exactly the type of employees needed.

The employer who has never investigated the matter will be surprised at the results young men will secure. I believe that many

concerns could make astonishing increases in their sales by discharging some of the older salesmen who are trudging along in a hopeless rut, and hiring in their places a few young men. Many a firm has proved to its own satisfaction that four hustling young men at \$600 a year each will show more and better results than one old experienced salesman at \$2,400. And in a few years they will grow into four big money earners.

Besides, the infusion of a little young blood into the establishment has a good effect on the entire force. The new ideas and energy which it brings stimulate the older men and make them realize that they are not indispensable, but must keep well up with the procession if they want to hold their jobs.

I venture to say that the largest and most successful business houses are as a rule those which have during the past ten years steadily pushed young men to the front.

An employer said to me the other day, "I have no use for young men. What I want is men with years of experience." A few days later I happened to call at his office. It was full of men who were in their prime ten or twelve years ago and their methods of doing business were just about that much behind the times. His business was steadily going from bad to worse, for it was incapable of meeting the competition of firms which welcome young men and new methods.

After he has learned the value of young men, the employer still has to decide what particular type of young man makes the best employee. For instance, is the city bred man who lives with his parents to be preferred to the man from away up in the country who comes to the city to live in a hall bedroom and make his fortune?

Where knowledge of the city is not essential at the outset, I believe as a rule the country bred man makes the better employee. He may be a trifle slower and more awkward than his city brother at first, but he has the advantage of good habits, of not being afraid of long hours and of being willing to start at a very low salary. The city man is rarely entirely dependent upon his own resources and therefore lacks a strong incentive to faithful effort, while the man from the country knows that he must make good or walk back to the farm.

"Men from the country go at their work with an 'I will' spirit

that is simply irresistible," said a well known manufacturer to me the other day. "For example, I brought a young fellow down from my old home in New England a year or so ago, and for want of anything better to put him at, turned him loose in the shipping department and told him to see if he could make himself useful there for two or three weeks. Later when I went to transfer him to the factory the head of the shipping department would not listen to it. He said the young fellow had been putting in fourteen or fifteen hours a day and had learned nearly as much about the work as he himself knew, and was his most valuable man. We had tried a dozen city bred men in the same department before and not one of them had made good."

What is the value of college training as a preparation for business? It is a mistaken idea to suppose for a moment that colleges or universities or technical schools can create ability. If they could do that our institutions would be unable to accommodate the army of students which would pour in on them. College training can, however, develop a man's ability and can, therefore, increase his ultimate value in business.

As old Gorgon Graham says in his inimitable letters, "anything that trains boys to think and think quick pays." This is exactly what a college education does. It teaches a man very few things that he can make use of in business, but it teaches him how to acquire knowledge of new things and to acquire it quickly. It does not give him brains; it teaches him how to use what brains he has. For the first two or three months the average college man in business is worth no more than a sixteen-year old boy who has begun work on leaving the grammar or high school. At the end of that period, however, he begins to increase rapidly in value and before two years are past he will be earning more money than the man without the college training, who had four or five years' start of him in business.

The only way to satisfy yourself as to the usefulness or worthlessness of college men is to watch the results obtained by other employers who employ them, or better still to hire a few yourself. A notable instance of the value of college men is furnished by the Western Electric Company, which began employing college men about ten years ago and has found that 90 per cent of them make good, as compared with 10 per cent of the men who enter business

on leaving the high or grammar school. A large percentage of the executive officers and heads of departments of this great company are college men who have worked their way up from the ranks. Another concern which is finding college men a very profitable investment is Sears, Roebuck & Company, the well known mail order house. This year it is engaging about fifty young graduates. They start them at moderate salaries with a view to teaching them the business and training them for responsible positions.

If an employer wants a man to address envelopes or keep books all his life he would better not hire a college man. The college man becomes discontented in such a position. He is perfectly willing to start at the very bottom of the ladder, but his training has given him the ability to do better things and the ambition to climb higher. If the employer wants men whom he can start addressing envelopes or keeping books with a view to some day putting them at more responsible work, he can use the college graduate to advantage.

It is a frequent occurrence for well known men to tell me: "I have tried a college graduate and found him absolutely no good; I wouldn't have another college man in my establishment."

I invariably ask: "Where did you get your college man?" and I find that they hired the son of some particular friend or relative—a man whose college education simply increased the lack of brains and energy with which he entered college.

The value of any force of men lies in its selection. The college man should be chosen as carefully as any other employee. It is a mistake to suppose for a moment that a college education makes him a man. In choosing college men, the same care must be exercised in order to get men with energy and determination. Those men who have worked their way through college deserve special confidence.

The up-to-date employer will appreciate the value of his employees and will make a careful study of the relative worth of the different classes of men whom he engages. Of course no set rule can be made, for varying conditions will set different standards. The experience of many employers, however, shows that it is well for every establishment to have growing up with it a large force of energetic, capable young men, and that other things being equal,

country-bred boys and college men offer the most promising material.

Men succeed according to their capacity for hard work and their honesty, and according to this, college men are more apt to possess these qualities than others. Statistics based on data gathered from the experience of a hundred business houses and covering a period of three or four years show that about 90 per cent of the college men are successful in rising to large salaried and responsible positions as compared with 25 per cent of the non-college men. According to these figures \$800 a year is the limit of the non-college man who has at least four years and in some cases a longer start of the college man. Only 10 per cent of the college men are absolute failures and 75 per cent of them rise above \$1200 a year.

There is no doubt that college graduates are the chief and best source of supply for the reserve force which every progressive firm should be accumulating. The advantages of those with only high school training should not, however, be overlooked. Many of the large city high schools, in fact, give courses that are almost equal to those of the small colleges.

In some branches of business, high school men are perhaps preferable to college men, especially in routine clerical work as the man fresh from high school is usually a better penman and quicker at figures. The college man is, however, almost always superior in judgment, knowledge of human nature and other qualities which come with age and the employer who wants a young man to grow up with his business and develop the right ability for a responsible position is taking great chances in hiring one who has had less than a high school education.

Men who have worked their way through college are most likely to prove valuable provided they are placed in congenial work. The very fact that they made their own way is fairly good proof of grit and capacity for hard work and in earning their expenses, they have brushed up against business more or less and gained experience which is bound to prove valuable even if only to show what work they are best fitted for. One or two of the largest employers of college men show a marked preference for those who had to make their way, and the man whose expenses have been paid by some one else has to look very good indeed in order to secure even a hearing.



A point upon which employers differ is as to whether men from the country are better than men from the city. The feeling that country bred men are likely to work harder is widespread, and although it has much evidence in its support there is hardly enough to justify turning down applicants simply because they happen to be city born and bred. And for some lines of work — selling, for example,— the city man is often the better.

There is also difference of opinion as to the relative advantages of men from the large and small colleges. This, however, is by no means an essential point, for both turn out good men. One Western employer says: "Of the two most capable young men I have recently hired, one is from a small freshwater college, and the other a graduate of the University of Chicago."

"It is personality on which I base my judgment," says a well-known employer who has hired enough college men during the past few years to be an authority on the subject. "I do not care what school he comes from or what course he has taken so long as he is a clean cut fellow whose looks indicate brains, energy and capacity for work. Other things being equal, I give preference to a man from the country as being more likely to be a man of steady habits and to the man who has had to make his own way as being more likely to be a worker. It matters little what standing a man has had during his course so long as whatever he has done has been done honestly."

It is well to consider a man's physical strength as well as his mental ability and character. A Pittsburgh employer, who during the past three years has hired and trained up in a large department nearly one hundred college and technical school men, says that a large percentage of the failures among them have been due to lack of physical force. "This has not taught me to seek for the athletes and the men who hold the strength test records, but it has taught me to turn down an otherwise good man, unless he looks in first class health and able to stand a pace which is bound to be rapid in this business."

Many employers who are impressed with the advantages of college men are doubtful as to where they can be used to the best advantage. One remarked the other day, "I would like to try out half a dozen young graduates, but I don't know what department to start them in." The answer to this is that they can be used to

advantage in any department where there is opportunity for a young man to learn and to advance as he makes himself valuable.

In sales work college men have been found particularly valuable. The life insurance companies were doubtless the pioneers in using them in outside work, but now publishing companies, bond houses, office appliance firms, and mercantile and manufacturing houses of all kinds are employing hundreds of them every year to strengthen their sales forces. A New York publishing house put a young New England college man into new territory in July, 1905. He made good — emphatically so. During his first six months he sold more goods than any new man had ever done in a similar period. The sales manager of the company expressed surprise that he had done so well. The young man replied, "If I could earn my way through college by selling subscription books, I ought to be able to make good with you."

It being impossible to judge accurately of a man's fitness for selling work until he has been given more or less of a trial, many firms have found it a good plan to conduct training schools for young college men. They take the men about July 1st and for six, eight or ten weeks familiarize them thoroughly with the line of goods and the best methods of selling them. During this educational period the men are paid a bare living salary with the guarantee that if they master the details of the business and show signs of selling ability, they will be given positions as salesmen on an attractive salary and commission basis. In this way, during the past few years, two or three notably successful sales forces have been organized.

In straight clerical work the young college man is often at a disadvantage, owing to his poor penmanship and his ignorance of bookkeeping, but the quickness with which he picks up general office details is often surprising. There is in western Pennsylvania to-day a chief clerk in a large office who five years ago a green hand, just out of college, started with this firm at \$10 a week. The first few weeks he was worth little or nothing and several times was on the point of being dismissed. Then he began to increase rapidly in value and to-day he is one of the ablest men in the employ of this large corporation.

The value of college training very often comes out in peculiar ways. A young man began work a few years ago for a large in-

insurance and real estate company. He was not of prepossessing appearance and on this account and because his references (all of them from college professors) laid such emphasis on the fact that he had specialized in foreign languages and attained high rank in these courses, the general manager of the company came near refusing his application for employment. "French, Spanish and German are of no use in this business," grumbled the manager, but nevertheless he put the young man to work, for he needed a man badly. To-day he is glad he did so.

The young man started as a filing clerk, getting out and putting away documents and papers used by the different officers of the company. It was not long before they discovered that when they asked for certain information about a piece of real estate the young man could furnish it with surprising promptness. Often they noticed, he would tell its value, size, location, etc., without referring to the files. Finally the reliability and remarkable scope of his memory attracted the attention of the president of the company and he was promoted, until he is now at the head of an important department. His French, Spanish and German were of no use in the insurance business, but the training he gained in mastering these languages — the development which it gave his memory,— is worth a good many thousand dollars a year to his employers.

Unless a man is wanted for technical work, it matters little what course he has taken so long as he knows how to work. It is not the knowledge gained in college that makes the young graduate successful, but rather the training he gained in securing that knowledge. From the employers' standpoint, it has been my experience that graduates from institutions like the Wharton School, the Tuck School and others have very little, if any, advantage over those who have taken only the ordinary academic course. Looked at from the standpoint of the man himself, it is doubtful if the course given by these schools gave him enough better equipment to warrant spending an additional year. Courses in business law, corporation accounting and transportation, if he can take them during his regular course, cannot help being of great assistance. The college graduate who has brushed up against actual business during his course by managing one of the college papers or athletic teams or by earning his expenses in some business venture is usually a great

deal more valuable than the man who has done none of these things but has taken courses in administration and finance.

Commercial clubs, such as exist at the University of Wisconsin and a number of other institutions are very helpful and should be found in every college and university. These clubs have as members all seniors who are planning to enter business. Meetings are held every two weeks during the year and at them addresses on various practical topics are given by well-known business men. A list of subjects by one of these clubs included "advertising," "the value of card systems," "hiring men," "working up export trade," etc. It seems to me that much more practical benefit can be derived through a general survey of subjects like this than from mastering the intricacies of a course in railroad accounting.

The best training for commercial careers seems to be that gained from a general A. B. or B. S. course, with special attention given during the last year to banking, transportation, money and credit, business law, corporation accounting, etc. It is a serious question whether any young man who plans to enter business can afford to extend the time spent in preparation beyond the usual four year course. If, however, a man is not too old and so situated that he can, for a few months, put off beginning to earn a living, I think the courses offered by the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania, the Tuck School at Dartmouth and other similar institutions are extremely valuable. These institutions have hardly been in existence long enough to prove definitely their value in helping prepare a man for business, but judging from the success of several young men who have been graduated from them and whose careers I have had an opportunity to watch they are of great benefit. It happens that nearly all of the men I have in mind have supplemented their courses in the theory of business with more or less general knowledge of actual practice which they have picked up during vacation or before entering college and I believe that the value of such experience cannot be overlooked.

If handled rightly, no class of men are more easily inspired with enthusiasm and loyalty than young college graduates. They like to know all that they can about the business and to feel that they are part of it, even if they are drawing only small salaries. The encouragement, which they need and should have, does not necessarily take the form of frequent increases in salary. There are one hun-

dred and one ways in which their spirits may be kept at the right pitch without continually increasing the salary expense, but when they do merit a raise they should get it without delay unless you want to run the risk of losing good men whose training has cost you a lot of money just as they are becoming worth something.